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New York: Spy capital of the world

First of five articles

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It had been a hard day of spying and now the secret agent wanted only to relax. He pulled the stool up to the piano and began a Chopin nocturne. (All good spies, of course, are well trained culturally.)

But a spy's work is never done. Suddenly the agent heard a board creak behind him. Opening the hidden mirror on the front of the upright, he saw a dark figure aiming a weapon at his back. Unperturbed—good spies are always cool—he hit the low E-flat key. At once twin machine guns appeared from the piano legs and spat fire. The spy's enemy now a crumpled heap, he turned back to the piano and resumed the nocturne.

A scene from a good trashy spy novel? Most people today would pass this off as something out of Ian Fleming. But not so long ago, many would have supposed this kind of incident to be close to the way that real spies work.

It's a measure of the times that today public thinking, at least in most of the Free World, is far more sophisticated about the way espionage is conducted. In this country the well-publicized reaction of the press and the Congress over past "abuses" of the CIA has caused an unusual amount of public literature on the secret service practices of the United States and, increasingly, of the Soviet Union's KGB. In fact, never before has something so secretive been so publicly discussed and written about.

World's largest spy group

Despite the growth of public information about espionage, there still exist great misconceptions about the nature of modern spy activity, its prevalence and its aims. The spy business is booming and America—particularly New York City—is the prime target area for the world's largest and most purposeful intelligence service, that of the Soviet Union and its affiliated bloc

nations.

Though Washington, D.C., with its renowned who-gives-a-damn attitude toward secrecy, ranks a close second to New York in spy appeal, the Big Apple has irresistible advantages for the ambitious spy.

New York City has the United Nations, and the U.N. diplomat has extraordinary freedom of movement in America, far more so than a Washington embassy staffer. What few checks remain today on hostile intelligence activities are pretty much absolved by the unique cover the United Nations affords a "diplomat." Like embassy staffs in Washington, at least 75 percent of the employees of all communist block U.N. missions are said to be intelligence agents, according to our own security services.

Brian Crozier, director of the London-based Institute for the Study of Conflict, reports that about half of the 1,000 or so Soviet officials in the United States are in New York, most of those at the United Nations. This makes New York the largest Soviet spy center anywhere in the world.

New York is home base for a spy war of unequalled proportions and magnitude, although it is less a war in the normal sense than it is an unopposed battle inflicted on the City. Little is being done by our own agencies—strapped by cutbacks and increased regulations—to actively counter hostile spying.

Tamper-free espionage

For one example, the primary American security organization allowed to conduct counterintelligence operations within the United States is the FBI—which not long ago was forced to dissolve its internal security and extremists divisions under pressure from reform-happy Congress, resulting in the termination in 1976 of over 20,000 domestic surveillance cases and virtually insuring tamper-free hostile intelligence.

In New York the spy war can take some bizarre twists of strategy.

When Arkady Shevchenko, one of the highest ranking Soviet U.N. officials, defected to the United States recently, the public first became aware of his real identity as a KGB agent—a fact that the CIA had known for some

Communist complicity in the Kennedy assassination, first implied in the testimony of another earlier Soviet defector, Yuri Nosenko. Nosenko was directly involved with Lee Harvey Oswald when the assassin was in the Soviet Union; and when Nosenko came over, he went to pains to deny any KGB dealing with Oswald.

Some CIA personnel found that denial hard to believe. The result was increasing controversy over Nosenko's authenticity—was he a real defector or a plant assigned to deliver false information?

The plot thickened when Nosenko's testimony in turn cast credibility doubts on two other Soviet agents, who apparently have burrowed themselves into concealed, well-placed locations within the American diplomatic or intelligence community but who have continuously fed information to the United States. A lot of CIA and FBI thinking is based on what these three Russians have revealed.

Now it seems Shevchenko may have a lot to say on who the three men really are. But then the inescapable question in turn arises about Shevchenko's own credibility. It's not impossible, some officials feel, for Shevchenko to be willing to put the finger on his compatriots to earn himself a place of trust with the Americans, placing himself in a position to continue further disinformation. The scenario is not at all unlikely.

It is no accident that Shevchenko's case centers on New York City.

The fact is, New York has become the hostile intelligence playground. Spies of every stripe and agents of influence of every persuasion operate here with abandon, their only check a much-hampered FBI. Of the 20,000